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AUTHOR	Stakes, Mary E.
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ABSTRACT

Teachers can create an interest in the founding period of U.S. history and present students with an authentic view of this time period through the presentation of this play. The dramatic pretense of the play is that the audience, by their presence, is part of the drama. The audience plays the part of travelers visiting a Philadelphia home in the late 1780s to learn more about everyday life, as well as about the events that took place in Philadelphia in 1787. The stage is simply set, using items that suggest the period. The script was developed from various publications available on the founding period. The two characters, Mary and Edwin Hopkins, are a middle-class couple with five children. Mr. Hopkins is a printer, and Mrs. Hopkins is a housewife who welcomes the visitors and tells of the everyday duties of running her household, such as sewing and cooking. She tells the visitors how the Revolutionary War affected her family. Mr. Hopkins discusses his job and tells the visitors about the important documents he has printed. He describes the nation as it was during the 1780s, including the transportation system, communication, and different customs. The couple describe the major cities of that period, New York, Williamsburg, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, and Philadelphia to the visitors. The sources that formed the basis for the script are listed. (SM)

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"WELCOME TO PHILADELPHIA"

An original dramatization of life in the 1780s

by

Mary E. Stakes

Governmental Education Division

Carl Vinson Institute of Government
The University of Georgia

November 1987

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INTRODUCTION

This play was performed as the opening session of the Teacher-Leadership Conference: Preparing for the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. The conference, held November 5-7, 1987 in Athens, Georgia, was developed by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government of the University of Georgia and funded in part by the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. The purpose of the dramatization was to create interest in the historical period and to demonstrate a creative device for teaching the founding period.

The dramatic pretense of this play is that the audience, merely by their presence, is a part of the drama. The audience plays the part of travelers -- as indeed they were -- visiting a Philadelphia home in the late 1780s to learn more about everyday life as well as the momentous events that took place there in the summer of 1787. The actors were in costume and character as the participants registered for the conference and greeted them as such. Conferees were asked to sign their names using a quill pen. The actors did not break character until after the play ended.

The stage (front of the room) was set simply, using items commonly found in homes today. The props are listed, and other items as available could be used. The script, too, can be modified to meet audience needs. Rather than memorize their lines, the actors read dramatically from the script.

The script was developed from various publications available on the founding period. They are listed under "Sources." The characters are fictitious but most of the incidents discussed in the script are factual and can be documented.

Audience response was enthusiastic. Teachers' comments on the play showed that it did indeed serve to stimulate their own creative thinking about the founding period.

CHARACTERS

Narrator
Mary Hopkins - an adult female, wearing a mob cap, long dress or long skirt and blouse, apron, fichu at neck.
Edwin Hopkins - an adult male, wearing knee breeches, long vest, shirt with stock, tricorn hat, printer's apron.

PROPS

In designing the set, remember the props do not need to be elaborate. Their purpose is to suggest the period and create an illusion.

Cloth-covered table set with:
    dishes (pewter plates or mugs, blue willow patterned china)
    candlesticks (brass or pewter)
Sewing basket filled with yarn, embroidery, mending, etc.
Picture of George Washington (optional)
Coat tree hung with a tricorn hat, bonnet, shawl, etc.
Quilt-draped chair
Quill pens and ink for audience to use in signing their names
Map of the thirteen colonies

SOURCES

Books

Barbash, Fred. THE FOUNDING: A DRAMATIC ACCOUNT OF THE WRITING OF THE CONSTITUTION. New York: The Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Collier, Christopher, and James Lincoln Collier. DECISION IN PHILADELPHIA: THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF 1787. New York: Ballantine Books, 1986.

Mee, Charles L., Jr. THE GENIUS OF THE PEOPLE. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

Morris, Richard B. SEVEN WHO SHAPED OUR DESTINY: THE FOUNDING FATHERS AS REVOLUTIONARIES. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Tripp, Valerie. AN INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAMSBURG. Madison, WI: Pleasantry Press, 1985.

Periodicals

LIFE. Volume 10, Number 10. (Special Issue on the Constitution) Fall, 1987.

Educational Materials

PHILADELPIA, 1787. A 22 1/2" x 28 1/2" color illustrated map of the city of Philadelphia at the time of the Constitutional Convention. Streets and structures important in the development of the city are shown. Artist: Bob Terrio. Historian: Anna Coxe Toogood. Part of a packet titled CELEBRATING THE CONSTITUTION 1787-1987 available from Eastern National, 313 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106 (1-800-821-2903).

Narrator: The time is 1788. You are travelers from the south. You have journeyed all the way to Philadelphia to see the great city and learn for yourself why this is the city where the Declaration of Independence was signed, the Articles of Confederation drafted, and the Constitution of the United States written. You are about to enter the home of Edwin and Mary Hopkins. They are a middle-class couple with 5 children. Edwin Hopkins came to Philadelphia as a young lad and was apprenticed to a printer. He now works in the shop of Claypoole and Dunlap, most recently distinguished as printers of the Constitution. Mary Hopkins, his wife, was born in Philadelphia and works hard at keeping an economical household.

Today is like any other day. Mrs. Hopkins is at home and her husband is hard at work at the print shop. Please come in and be their guests.

Mary: Welcome to Philadelphia. I have been so excited ever since I learned you were coming to visit. Philadelphia is such a large city (40,000 people I've heard) that we get many visitors. But it is not often that Mr. Hopkins, that's my husband, and I are called on to entertain them. I have to apologize for being in my work clothes, but I didn't know exactly when you would arrive. This country is so big, that it just takes folks longer to get from one place to another. Look at yourselves. As you just found out, the journey from Georgia to Philadelphia is a five to seven day trip depending on whether it's a sea or land route.

You are so fortunate to be visiting in November rather than the summer. The heat and flies and mosquitoes make this city almost unbearable in the summer. Thomas Jefferson said -- do you know who Thomas Jefferson is? -- well, he said that one reason the

Declaration of Independence was signed so quickly was because the flies here were biting through everyone's silk stockings!

I hope all of you have signed our guest book. Mr. Hopkins and I are so proud to have you here. I understand you are from states far south of Pennsylvania and that most of you are teachers and scholars and that you want to know more about Philadelphia and all the things that have happened here. Mr. Hopkins and I are happy to tell you what we know.

This has been an exciting decade for us as Americans. You know it still is a thrill for me to use that word -- Americans. As you know, near the start of the decade the war ended. It was such a relief. October 18, 1781 is a date I will never forget. When the news reached us of General Washington's victory at Yorktown, there was a celebration in the streets the likes of which I have never seen. And it happened again in 1783 when the Treaty of Paris ending the war was signed. What we had done as Americans was an amazing thing. The rest of the world held us in awe. We Americans had beaten the mightiest army in the world. You can imagine the pride and the emotions that we felt.

War is a terrible thing. I lost my father and I was worried that I would never see Mr. Hopkins again. But this war, in spite of all the suffering it caused, was a good war. It set us free to control our own destiny. It pulled all of us together. It united us because we were fighting the British who were using us with no regard to our needs. It got so that I hated seeing the color red. But, like I was saying, all of us, no matter what state a person was from, we were all fighting together.

At the same time the war ended with the battle at Yorktown, all the states signed a document known as the Articles of Confederation, which created a new government. Now, we were officially the United States of America. I don't know why, but it never seemed to work right. All of that energy and good feeling we had after the war started to disappear. States started to quarrel with one another and there was never enough money to buy goods. Conditions just got worse and worse until in 1786 there was a rebellion in Massachusetts that was called Shays' Rebellion after its leader, Daniel Shays. I was really scared. I thought we were in for wars again. But who would have dreamed, and I hope this is the answer to my prayers, that in less than a decade, we'd have another government? And just like the first one, the Articles of Confederation, it was created right here in Philadelphia. I want to tell you more about the Grand or Federal convention and about our wonderful city but I think I'll wait until Mr. Hopkins gets here.

You might like to know more about me. I see that my clothes are somewhat different from yours, which strikes me as very strange, so perhaps I should explain. I have on my mob cap which protects my hair from dust and dirt. This is my second-best fichu and it's worn so I won't be immodest. I make most of the clothes that we wear. Actually I love to sew. During the Federal Convention last year when the new government was created, I helped my friend Mrs. Dailey who runs a boarding house down the street. Not every day, but there were times when she needed an extra hand. And sometimes when the gentlemen who were boarding there had a small rip or a button that needed fixing, I'd do that. Actually my days are full running the household here. I do the cooking and see that everyone is well-fed

and decently clothed so they can go about their business in Philadelphia.

Of course I do my cooking in the kitchen which is in the back room. I'm a fair baker which I credit to having a chimney with such a good draft. The fireplace has a nice oven on the side and I turn out good breads and occasional cookies and sweets. I've made my favorite tea cakes just for you. I'll serve you some later. Do you like my china? It's from China and a favorite pattern in Philadelphia. I'm very proud of my pewter-ware, too.

Most of my cooking is done in pots set on trivets with coals raked under them. That way I can have as many things cooking as I have pots; I never run out of burners. Bigger pieces of meat are roasted on a high spit over the fire. You may wonder where we get our food in Philadelphia since we live in a city and not on a farm. Well, a few blocks from here is a wonderful market that is open 3 days a week. They sell fresh produce, dairy goods, poultry, fish, and meat. It's narrow and long with stalls for all the people selling their wares. It's always very neat and clean. But, we're not entirely dependent on the market. I keep some chickens and raise some vegetables and herbs.

But in Philadelphia at the market and shops, you could buy anything you wanted. From books and spyglasses, Windsor chairs, teas from Canton, shoes made locally, baskets, buckets, wine, horses, coaches, candles, or slaves. Oh, I think I hear Mr. Hopkins coming in. Hello Edwin, please come in and meet our guests.

Edwin: Hello, Mrs. Hopkins. [turning] I'm pleased to meet you and welcome to Philadelphia.

Mary: I was just telling them about Philadelphia and what a wonderful city it is. I know you can tell them more about the city and the rest of the country as well.

Edwin: [taking off his printer's apron and hanging it on a coat tree] As soon as I heard you were here, I rushed over without even changing. Mrs. Hopkins may have told you that I work at the printing firm of Claypoole and Dunlap. We take pride because last year we were chosen to print the first copies of the new Constitution. Printers are very important and the printing business is absolutely necessary in today's world. How else would we communicate? Did you know that Philadelphia is the leading publishing center in America? Why, we have 10 newspapers here in the city. We publish the Pennsylvania Packet. A printer can make a very good living here.

Besides a good living, there's another advantage to being a printer. I know so much of what's going on. We print books, proclamations, posters, and political pamphlets and our shop serves as a sort of information center. Notices and messages are posted and people often gather to bring and exchange news. America is such a large country that the printed word is the best way to communicate over long distances.

Mary: Mr. Hopkins, these good people want to know about life in the 1780s. They're teachers.

Edwin: So you want to know about America in the late 1780s? I know a lot. We didn't just get off the boat, you know. We have inhabited this continent for over 170 years. My own family has been here for generations and because of that I feel a part of this country, a loyalty that has only become more intense -- the war helped that.

It's only right that we should be a nation, deciding and choosing our destiny for ourselves.

But you want to know about America. There are nearly 3 million of us including 600,000 slaves and virtually all of us live within 100 miles of the Atlantic Ocean in a band that stretches 1,200 miles from Maine to Georgia. The center of population is 25 miles east of Baltimore. Over 75% of the white population is British or Irish stock. Over 85% of the people speak English as a first language. There are some Catholics and some Jews but the country is overwhelmingly Protestant.

This is a large country. [pointing to map] Some people think that it is too large a place to be governed effectively as a single nation. Travel and communication are difficult. The roads are poor or nonexistent and most people don't travel very far, very often. Only the wealthy or merchants visit the big cities with any regularity. Because we're so large there are many differences in regions of the country. Differences in economics, religion, attitudes, customs. The people are even beginning to talk differently. I have not travelled all that far myself, but I see a lot of people who come to Philadelphia and I like to visit with them at the taverns. We have a lot of Quakers in this city, plain folk. You can imagine the contrast when we have wealthy planters come up from the south all decked out in their silks and satins. It's like having tropical birds in the city, they're so colorful!

Perhaps I should describe several of our major cities to you: New York, our 2nd largest city, has a population of over 33,000. You will find the very rich and the very poor. So nothing changes!

[Ed shrugs his shoulders.] English-loving aristocrats can be seen side by side with dockhands, day laborers and free Negroes. Here you will find little communities of the Scots, the Jews, and the Germans all living in little ethnic blocks. Boston is one of our most important towns, as any of its 18,000 people will tell you. It was here that many people say our revolution began. Boston is a major port city, and home of fishermen, whalers, smugglers, and democracy. Nearly every adult male has the vote and the principles of simple, egalitarian self-government are deeply embedded in their culture.

Williamsburg. Virginia has some distinction and Richmond, the new capital city, holds the promise of one day being an important city. But right now, Charleston is the only southern city of note. With a population of 10,000, it is a tightly-knit community consisting of wealthy families living in a degree of privilege and comfort that we northern people find almost bizarre. Charleston is the principal port and market in America for slaves. Living on the plantations around Charleston are 6,000 white males and more than 100,000 slaves.

Mary: Mr. Hopkins, don't forget the greatest city of all, Philadelphia. After all, it is where the government was created.

Edwin: I was getting to that. We are proud of our growing city, the largest in the country. Already more than 40,000 people live in Philadelphia. We have a prosperous port and we're in touch with the rest of the world.

Mary: At the same time, Philadelphia is a sophisticated city. We have 33 churches, a Philosophical Society, a public library, a museum, a poorhouse, a model jail, a model hospital, and a

dispensary for the poor. We even have 662 streetlamps!

Edwin: Our towns are important, but actually only 10% of Americans live in anything that could remotely be called a city or town. I wonder what it will be like 200 years from now. One thing that surely won't change in the future is the fact that most Americans will prefer to live in the countryside as farmers. It's estimated that 90% of white American males are farmers. They either own a farm or work as laborers on a farm. The remaining 10% are businessmen, or lawyers, or printers, or artisans.

Probably what makes America special is our access to so much land. Land is a precious commodity. It's a source of wealth. In other countries, land isn't as available as in America. Here, it is almost unlimited and available to anyone who wants to work hard. What happens out on the frontier is a loss of class and ranks. Everyone becomes equal. When a man has only himself and his family to depend on for his success, he becomes mighty independent. He feels good about himself and he doesn't want others telling him what to do. I think that attitude which is typical in America had a lot to do with us beating the British.

Mary: That plus General Washington. He is THE most famous man in America. I think his portrait should hang in every school room in the country. Maybe one day, his face will even be on our money.

When the war ended, he went into retirement, returning to Mount Vernon to farm. But when the Grand Convention was called, he came and was elected its president. Now it's most likely he'll be the nation's first president. I heard that he almost didn't come. After all, he'd retired, his health wasn't all that good, and his

mother was ill. There was the added risk that if the Grand Convention came to no good, his reputation would be ruined. As it was, his presence made the convention a prestigious event.

His arrival in Philadelphia was spectacular. The general was riding in his fine little coach called a chariot and he was met by the officers of the Revolution. All those officers were joined by the Philadelphia Light Horse Company and they rode into the city all in uniform. The city church bells were ringing and some cannons were fired, and most all of Philadelphia turned out along the way to applaud the general. He was going to stay at Mrs. House's Boarding House but Robert and Mary Morris insisted he stay at their house. It's one of the most elegant in the city. He just took time to get his things in and then he set out to pay a call on Dr. Franklin.

Edwin: I was waiting there as he came down Market Street and got to shake his hand. I've known Dr. Franklin a long time since we're in the same business. The doctor is pretty old now and doesn't get around much. He brought back a sedan chair from France and prisoners from the Walnut Street jail carry him about if he needs to go any distance. By the way, Georgia and Pennsylvania have one thing in common when it comes to the good doctor. Before the recent war for independence, he was the agent in London for both of our colonies.

Mary: Tell them about Dr. Franklin's house. It's a marvel.

Edwin: In truth, there are all sorts of oddities there, and lots of them invented by Dr. Franklin himself. Going for a visit is as good as going to a museum. He has a music room with a harpsichord, a set of English hand bells, musical glasses, and he has a library with over 4,000 volumes. Both are probably the best collections in

America. He has a great wonderful chair in which he can sit and rock and fan himself, all with the slightest motion of his foot! And he has invented a wonderful stove that keeps you so much warmer than a fireplace. He has been doing some exciting experiments with something called electricity. And, as you know, he is one of our most respected political figures.

Doctor Franklin is a man of great wisdom and humor but he is not given to boasting or bragging. He has always been a plain man and folks from every station are comfortable with him.

Mary: Tell them about the balloon.

Edwin: Well, it was one of the most profound things that Dr. Franklin ever said. He was in France several years ago and while watching a hot air balloon ascend, another man asked, "what good is it?" To which Dr. Franklin replied, "what good is a newborn baby?"

Mary: He is so wise. But at the Grand Convention, there were lots of wise men. There were lots of handsome ones, too. I told you I worked helping my friend Mrs. Dailey at her boarding house? One of her boarders was Alexander Hamilton from New York. He certainly cut a dashing figure, but probably he was a little too aristocratic for my taste. My favorite boarder of hers was Gouverneur Morris. He was born in New York but now he lives outside of Philadelphia and practices law in the city. He is extremely smart, and so witty, handsome -- so charming and entertaining.

Edwin: Damn cheeky rascal! Chasing after every skirt in the city!

Mary: Poor man, he has suffered a great deal. He was injured some years ago in a carriage accident on Dock Street.

Edwin: Harumph! Rumor was he was injured leaping from a lady's

bedroom window!

Mary: Lost his leg, has a wooden one now.

Edwin: Too bad he didn't lose more than a leg!

Mary: Mr. Hopkins! Such a thing to say! You had nothing but praise for him when you printed the Constitution. You told me he was the man who drafted it and put all those ideas into such precise and stylish language.

Edwin: Perhaps so, but that doesn't change the way I feel about him. Besides, the real workhorse of the convention was little James Madison of Virginia. He was a quiet fellow, but you could always tell that his mind was working and sifting through ideas. He stayed at Mrs. House's boarding house and he kept a candle burning all night so he could get up at any time and write down thoughts as they came to him. He told her he's always done that. Never slept but 3 or 4 hours anyway.

Mary: Mrs. House didn't know whether to charge him extra for all the candles. She had other boarders from Virginia, including Governor Edmund Randolph. It was odd, though, we never heard very much about what was going on during the Grand Convention. The delegates all arrived and settled in boarding houses and taverns and then they went to work.

Edwin: They made it clear from the start that they were going to conduct their business in private with no discussion from outsiders. They kept their word because I spent a lot of evenings in the taverns frequented by the delegates and I never heard what was being planned.

Mary: The city street commissioners had gravel put down in front of the State House to muffle the sounds of carriages and horses so as

not to disturb them. They even kept the windows closed so they couldn't be heard -- I don't know how they did that in the heat!

Edwin: We would have been glad for news of the convention to print in our paper but all we could do was write articles of encouragement and be optimistic that something constructive was getting done.

Mary: We were probably as relieved as the delegates when the convention ended. We were so fortunate to be here in Philadelphia so we were the first to know the results. Of course, once the convention ended, the real work began. That was convincing everyone that the new government should be accepted.

Edwin: Yes, the ratification efforts. It's sort of funny now. The people who were against the Constitution tried to call the supporters "ratificationists," so they could nickname them "rats" and give them a bad image to begin with.

Mary: But Washington and Madison and those in favor of ratification sort of stole their thunder when they took on the name Federalists. In truth, we always thought of Federalists as those who believed in a federal form of government like the one under the Articles of Confederation.

Edwin: The Federalists should have called themselves "Nationalists" because they believed in a strong national government, but they didn't. They took the name Federalist which had a long and familiar tradition to Americans. Their opponents were reduced to calling themselves "anti-federalists" which immediately put men like Patrick Henry on the defensive.

Mary: You know, Mr. Hopkins, the ratification efforts certainly helped the newspaper business. What with the printing of speeches

and letters both for and against the ratification, the newspapers did well.

Edwin: You may have heard about one particular series of essays supporting the Constitution. They were known as the Federalist Essays, signed anonymously by someone calling himself Publius. It's no secret that they were actually written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. You know our state, Pennsylvania, was the second to ratify the Constitution, Georgia was the fourth, and South Carolina the eighth.

Mary: Five months ago New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify, making the new Constitution official. This left New York, such a large state, no choice but to follow. There's just as much news now about getting the new government organized. The new Congress is scheduled to meet next April. But that is another story. I think we have told our guests enough about the past decade of the 1780s. I imagine, Mr. Hopkins, unless you have something else to add, you need to be getting back to work.

Edwin: You're right, Mrs. Hopkins. I only wish to [said to audience] thank you for your kind attention and wish you a pleasant stay in Philadelphia.

[The Hopkins bow and curtsey and exit.]